

When I saw Max Neuhaus' sound installation at the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris (ARC) in the summer of 1983, I was faced with a puzzle: the room - almost square - was empty, filled only by the typical sound of a hot day, that of the not very efficient air-conditioning system. What did the work by Max Neuhaus consist of? I tried to determine whether other sounds were cloaked by that of the air conditioning; but all I could hear was the fluttering sound of the system itself, which stood in curious contrast to the motionless thin slats on the glass roof, shielding the room from the sun. Actually, Max Neuhaus had 'only' amplified and modified the sound of the air conditioning by means of ten electronically-controlled sound sources. Had they been turned off, the difference would have become audible. In this way, it was not.

And yet Max Neuhaus had succeeded in making the visitor's awareness of the room a unique experience by combining sight and sound in such a way that the two perceptual mechanisms were channeled into each other simultaneously and on the same level.

For his sound installation at the Kunsthalle Basel, Max Neuhaus used a similar technique. He first located all the sounds and noises in the large hall on the second floor: passing traffic and streetcars, additionally amplified by the pipes of the heating system fitted behind paneling around the entire hall - a feature of this particular room. Neuhaus also noticed the creaky old parquet floor and an occasional click in the pipes. He then used a synthesizer to create a loose layer of sounds and noises along the edges of the hall measuring 22m in length, 11m in width and 10m in height. The effect was somewhere between a clicking and a dripping sound that could clearly be heard, when it was quiet, emanating from the

However, if sculpture in public spaces aims at rendering a qualitative improvement in the exploitation of empty spaces for the public, then the artist's approach and field of action in public space must be totally re-defined. Ultimately, this could mean that a work as such is not even in evidence although it does exist in itself.

A word about Max Neuhaus' drawings. We can distinguish between projects, realizations and works in progress. Project drawings are made to illustrate ideas for a given location (*Freeway Stack*) or a given situation (*Sound Installations for Elevator Passengers*). In the case of *Freeway Stack*, a freeway intersection in Los Angeles, the location was reconnoitered, whereas the elevator concept is more or less generally applicable. Realizations can be made only upon completion of a piece, since the artist cannot predict its outcome. The final product is often a consequence of unpredictable auditory steps, of unexpected events in the course of an acoustic modification or installation. Major projects, such as the one for the 160m long pedestrian tunnel Montparnasse-Bienvenue (Métro, Paris), with their complexity and their planning mechanisms, must therefore be divided into stages of work in progress.

The drawing shows a location and the idea connected with it. It is intended for the viewer. Although a project drawing, it is not a blueprint for technical realization. Drawing and commentary complement each other: the drawing shows something that cannot be expressed in words; the words serve to express that which cannot take the form of a drawing. (While talking to Max Neuhaus, I was reminded of similarities with a weather chart.)

*Time Pieces* is an acoustic project designed for a large space, which runs intermittently, as opposed to Neuhaus' 24-hour continuums. 'A sonority integrated

lower part of the room and blending with the sounds outside. The sound sources were invisible, hidden under the heating system.

A third example is *Times Square* installation executed in New York in 1977. It is a permanent installation that works around the clock. Between 45th and 46th Streets where Broadway and Seventh Avenue begin to intersect, there is a traffic island covered by a subway ventilator grill about 10m long. Casual pedestrians will hardly notice the intense, organ-like sound coming from the grill; and if they do, they will probably attribute it to a transformer. But when the ear-splitting subway thunders by beneath their feet, they will be surprised to find that the intense, organ-like sound continues unabated. Here again, Neuhaus began by taking up a possible existing sound, in fact by taking in the entire aural situation of that particular location. Actually there is no transformer or generator there, but similar sounds occur at comparable places in the city.

These three pieces reveal the following features in Max Neuhaus' work:

- a) Point of departure is always an existing situation, whether inside or out. In other words, Neuhaus uses the particular environment: its architecture, its landscape, its sounds. This necessitates a thorough reconnaissance of the surroundings.
- b) He produces no extrinsic noises or sounds.
- c) He enhances an aural situation in such manner that the change is almost imperceptible to listeners accustomed to its sounds, thus making the perception of a space, an environment, a location with its specific features a conscious act. Only by listening and moving around with attentive concentration can one penetrate the acoustically-modified inside or outside space.
- d) He always uses a synthesizer, sounds produced electronically; he does not use tapes. These sounds have neither beginning nor end; they run 24 hours a day.

with its surroundings begins softly, grows over a period of minutes and suddenly disappears. The mixture of the sonority with the sounds in its environment, and its very gradual growth, cause it to go unnoticed. When it disappears listeners first realize it was there' (M.N.).

The idea for *Time Pieces* was initially realized in 1979 as a personal alarmclock which woke sleepers with sudden silence. In 1981 Neuhaus conceived it as a large scale public work; in 1982 he developed the idea as a large space project for Tokyo.

When the location yields sounds and noises far removed from one another, the sonority swells only gradually and is thus integrated into its aural surroundings. In locations where sound and sound patterns are more uniform and closer together, the sonority swells relatively quickly.

For Max Neuhaus, *Time Pieces* are a concern of the greatest importance because, extended over a large space, they exert a unifying influence on a public; people find and recognize each other. The apt association with church bells has also occurred to Neuhaus, but there is something too explicit, too aggressive about them. Finding and recognizing each other, according to Neuhaus, takes the shape of a more ordinary, meditative moment, of an almost imperceptible accord among those to whom his work appeals. But as time passes more and more people would share in this ordinary accord because perception of the sonority and its abrupt disappearance also take place unconsciously.

(Canadian Murray Schafer, a sound historian one might say, has pointed out the unconscious unifying effect of such sounds as fog horns.)

I can well remember the car-free Sundays that followed in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis. I woke up early in the morning on the first such Sunday because of the unaccustomed quiet. The work of 43-year-old Max Neuhaus deals precisely with this domain of conscious-unconscious aural perception, not only because of

e) In terms of the perception of his works, the following observations can be made. We first perceive noises and sounds and we are quick to identify them with what we already know. Only later do we discover a displacement - sometimes more, sometimes less apparent - between our perception and that with which we have identified it. This displacement is like a gap, a sonority-space-image that becomes fixed in our minds as a memory.

Not until Max Neuhaus' principles are applied to sculpture in public spaces do we realize the full extent of his innovative achievement. We are accustomed to seeing random and thus interchangeable sculptures placed on ledges and in squares, parks and courtyards. This reduces them to decorative relics regardless of quality.

important insights gained in his early days as a percussionist, but also because of the realization that making this domain conscious is a vital concern. The name Robert Ryman has cropped up in speaking with Max Neuhaus about possible parallels in the fine arts.

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